Met Office

March 2011

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

Much of the month brought settled weather to the UK, though it was more unsettled during the period 7th to 15th in the north (with disruption caused by snowy conditions across many parts of Scotland), and again more widely over the last two or three days of the month. Rainfall amounts were notably low over large parts of England, with a number of stations totalling less than 5 mm for the whole month.

The UK mean temperature for the month was 0.3 °C above the 1981-2010 average, and it was particularly mild in the second half with some fine spring weather. Maximum temperatures were well above average. However, there were some cold nights, and the number of air frosts was close to normal for March. Rainfall was close to or just above normal over eastern and southern Scotland, but it was dry elsewhere, exceptionally so over much of central and eastern England where less than 20% of normal was recorded. East Anglia had its second driest March in a series since 1910; only 1929 was drier. It was also sunnier than normal across most of the UK, especially Wales (fifth sunniest March in a series since 1929), but over Scotland sunshine amounts were closer to normal.

A maximum temperature of 20.0 °C was recorded at Saunton Sands (Devon) on 25th. A minimum temperature of -7.5 °C was recorded at Braemar (Aberdeenshire) on the morning of 18th, and -7.2 °C was recorded at South Newington (Oxfordshire) early on 8th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on 31st, 55.0 mm of rainfall was measured at Black Sail, Ennerdale (Cumbria). Snow-depths of 29 cm were recorded at Aviemore (Inverness-shire) and at Balmoral (Aberdeenshire) at 0900 on 13th. A wind gust of 77 mph was recorded at Loftus (North Yorkshire) on 31st.

Weather Impacts

Winter returned to Scotland in the second week with strong winds and snowfalls, especially over higher ground. From 9th to 11th, heavy and drifting snow affected travel in parts of the Highlands with Inverness airport closed for a time and difficult driving conditions on roads such as the A9. Further snow in the next few days meant that travel disruption worsened and became more widespread, affecting many parts of central and northern Scotland. A number of routes in the Highlands were closed overnight 13th / 14th, including the A9 between Inverness and Perth and A roads around Grantown-on-Spey. Ice and fog also caused problems on 16th.

During the last ten days, spring arrived with temperatures climbing above 17 °C widely on several days, and approaching 20 °C in a few places on 25th. There was a return to unsettled weather at the end of the month, however, with strong winds across north-east England and eastern Scotland on 31st.

England diary of highlights

March was very dry, with little rain except in the final two days. Most of the month was quiet and settled, with a large anticyclone giving a period of fine spring weather in the second half, when daytime temperatures were well above average but nights were still close to freezing in places. Thus for the month as a whole, maximum temperatures were 1.0 °C above average but minima were very close to average. This was the driest March over England for 50 years, and equal fifth driest in a series since 1910. A large swathe of central and eastern

England received less than 20% of average, with a number of stations recording less than 5mm. Sunshine amounts were well in excess of average, with 126% recorded

1st to 8th

A ridge of high pressure dominated the opening week of March, with light winds, frosts and morning fog. The period started with low daytime maxima on 1st, no higher than 3 to 5 °C in southern England, and also low night-time minima with -5 °C recorded in northern England on both 2nd and 3rd. Mist and low cloud steadily lifted and broke as each day progressed to give spells of sunshine, although this became hazier towards the end of the week. Towards the end of the period, a weak cold front moved southwards through eastern England, giving a colder feel here for a time. The 8th was the last of the calm and bright days across England, with rain arriving in the north-west later on a strengthening wind.

9th to 11th

Low pressure systems passing to the north of the UK during this period pushed the high pressure away into the continent, with westerly flow becoming dominant and fronts moving south-eastwards through England. The 9th saw showers for northern England, with the wind increasing to give 50 to 60 mph gusts quite widely in northern England by 10th. The 11th saw rain in northern England and some hill snow for a time, while the south remained drier and brighter with the day's highest maximum temperature of 12.6 °C at St James' Park (central London).

12th to 17th

This was a transitional period with fronts reluctant to push through and frequently light and variable winds. Rain during the 12th was generally light, with the 13th seeing some more showery falls giving locally higher totals of around 4 mm over East Anglia. The 14th saw mist and coastal fog creep into eastern areas, suppressing daytime temperatures to around 5 or 6 °C in some eastern parts in the light winds. The 15th and 16th saw highs of around 17 °C in parts of the south, with rain in the west spreading northwards and thick fog over the low-lying fenland of the east on 16th. Increased cloud and light spells of rain limited the temperatures in some areas on 17th.

18th to 21st

High pressure developed over the near-continent, building from the south-east of England. As it became drier and clearer, daytime maximum temperatures steadily rose from 11 °C to 15 °C over the first three days, reaching 17 °C in north-east England by the 21st. After minima such as -6.7 °C at Santon Downham (Norfolk) on 19th, frost became less severe and widespread.

22nd to 28th

With high pressure dominant, this was a dry period of fine spring weather, although there was overnight mist and fog around coastal areas of the south-east and north-west in particular around the periphery of the high. Daytime temperatures consistently reached the high teens, peaking on the 25th in southern England (19.8 °C at Fontmell Magna, Dorset). Night-time mist and sea fog burned back to the coasts each day, but the sunshine became increasingly hazy as the high remained in place.

29th to 31st

More unsettled, wetter and windier conditions began to push in from the west toward end the month, with fronts passing over the country and weakening as they moved eastwards. The increased winds and cloud gave mild nights, with double-figure Celsius night-time lows recorded in parts of south-east England on the 31st.

Wales diary of highlights

March was notable for its dryness, with little rain except in the final three days. Much of the month was characterised by quiet, settled weather, with a large anticyclone giving a period of fine spring weather in the second half when daytime temperatures were above average but nights were still chilly in places. Thus for the month as a whole, maximum temperatures were 1.3 °C above average but minima were near average. This was the driest March for 50 years, and the 4th driest in a series since 1910. Most of Wales received less than a third of average rainfall. Sunshine amounts were well above average (153%), and it was particularly sunny in the west. This was the fifth sunniest March for Wales in a series from 1929.

1st to 7th

High pressure was located over or very close to Wales throughout the first week. This allowed calm conditions to prevail, largely sunny by day, and clear and frosty overnight, with especially sharp frosts for the nights of 3rd, 4th and 6th; -5 °C was reported in places across parts of east Wales.

8th to 10th

A cold front moved across Wales late on 8th and early on 9th, although the associated rain was light and patchy. There were south-westerly gales across many parts on 10th, and scattered light showers which continued until the evening before dying away.

11th to 14th

A slow-moving and rather slack area of low pressure dominated the weather through this period, with rain arriving across northern parts of Wales during 11th, followed by further outbreaks of light rain across much of Wales during 12th. The rain then cleared east during 13th, with sunshine following; 14th was also sunny, though temperatures remained below average.

15th to 18th

Bands of rain occasionally moved east or south-eastwards across Wales during this period. The rain was mainly light, although with the drier spells in-between sometimes large amounts of cloud remained, with mist along coasts, especially on 16th. On 18th, rain turned to snow across the hills of south Wales, before clearing away through the morning, southern and eastern areas then becoming sunny.

19th to 21st

Pressure built during 19th across much of the UK, but cloud and outbreaks of rain or drizzle, and low cloud and mist, still affected the far west of Wales at times. Eastern areas were dry, but often cloudy.

22nd to 28th

Pressure continued to build across the UK, bringing fine, dry spring weather to Wales. Early morning mist, patchy fog and low cloud lifted each day to give bright or sunny spells. By night it was chilly with occasional air frosts. By day, temperatures climbed above average, with a maximum of 18.9 °C at Gogerddan (Ceredigion), just south of Aberystwyth, on 24th. In contrast, on 27th persistent low cloud meant temperatures struggled to reach normal values across many parts of Wales.

29th to 31st

During this period the weather was much more changeable once again, with generally lower pressure and the passage of a number of frontal features bringing rain at times.

Scotland diary of highlights

The weather was settled for much of the month, although it was unsettled with periods of rain and snow between 7th and 15th and wet again at the end of the month. It was also quite mild generally during the second half. The mean temperature for the month was 0.4 °C above the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall ranged from rather above normal across north-eastern and eastern parts of Scotland to somewhat below normal in the west. Sunshine totals were mostly near normal.

1st to 8th

There was patchy rain in the north-west on 1st and 2nd, but elsewhere it was dry, with frost overnight. Daytime temperatures reached 12.9 °C at Fyvie Castle (Aberdeenshire) on 1st and Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) on 2nd. It remained rather cloudy on 3rd but mainly dry; however the far north and far south saw clear or sunny spells and an early frost. The 4th was cloudy and rather murky with some outbreaks of mainly light rain. The 5th was brighter, although the far west remained murky. The 6th saw cloud and patchy drizzle in the west but it was dry with clear or sunny spells in the east, with minimum temperature -4.7 °C at Aboyne. The 7th was a fine day for eastern and southern parts, with the temperature reaching 13.0 °C at Fyvie Castle, but cloudier with some rain in the north-west. Rain spread south-east on 8th followed by blustery showers, these turning wintry in the evening; 39.2 mm of rain was recorded in 24 hours at Kinlochewe (Highland).

9th to 15th

Blustery wintry showers on 9th gave snowfall in places, resulting in the closure of Inverness Airport for a time. The 10th was very windy, with severe gales and blustery wintry showers, frequent and heavy in the west. Showers continued during the morning of 11th, becoming fewer in the afternoon, although more persistent rain affected southern Scotland during the afternoon and evening with snow on higher ground. Persistent and occasionally heavy sleet and snow, with rain on coasts, spread north through 12th, with 29 cm of lying snow reported at Aviemore (Inverness-shire) and Balmoral (Aberdeenshire) by 0900 on 13th. The 13th and 14th were cloudy, with outbreaks of rain, sleet and snow, and snow up to a metre deep was reported in the Cairngorms. It was also windy with gales across the north. It was brighter over the north-west on 15th but with sleet and snow over the south-west and rain, heavy at times, in the east.

16th to 31st

Most places were dry on 16th. Mist and fog patches slowly dispersed to leave sunny spells. Rain cleared the east on the morning of 17th, leaving drier and brighter conditions, but showers followed for northern areas with snow on hills. All parts started dry, sunny and frosty on 18th, but heavy showers edged into the west during the morning, with a few in the east during the afternoon. The 19th was mostly dry with sunny spells. Patchy light rain died out on the morning of 20th, then it was dry, brighter and milder, Aberdeen reaching 14.6 °C. The 21st brought rain to the north-west, Kinlochewe recording 24.8 mm of rain in 24 hours, but elsewhere sunny spells helped to lift temperatures at Fyvie Castle to 15.9 °C. Patchy rain edged south on 22nd before it brightened up, with Leuchars (Fife) reaching 16.6 °C. Warm and sunny weather on the 23rd lifted temperatures to 16.5 °C at Dyce (Aberdeen), though some areas stayed cloudier. The 24th was mostly dry, with sunny spells in the south. The 25th was bright after the clearance of mist or fog across the south. Rain and hill snow affected parts of the north, north-east and east on the 26th, whereas it was mainly dry elsewhere with sunny spells. Most places were dry on 27th with some sunshine, then 28th was mainly dry again but more cloudy. The 29th and 30th were mainly cloudy with patches of light rain, and low cloud and mist becoming extensive across the north-east. A band of rain crossed the country during 31st, with gales across the south for a time.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

With high pressure nearby, the weather was settled for much of the month, although there were unsettled spells with rain between 8th and 14th and again at the end of the month. It was also quite mild generally during the second half. Mean temperatures for the month were near average. Rainfall totals were well below normal, and it was the driest March in Northern Ireland since 2003. Sunshine totals were well above normal.

1st to 7th

A ridge maintained generally dry weather on 1st with some overnight frost. Patchy rain arrived in the far north-west later on 2nd. The 3rd was dry with clear or sunny spells and a widespread frost, and the temperature at Castlederg (County Tyrone) reached 13.6 °C. It was cloudy and rather murky on 4th and early on 5th with patchy light rain, but despite the cloud, it did brighten up in places on 5th. Patchy rain also occurred during the 6th. A little rain fell at first on 7th then it was mainly dry and bright, with sunny spells in the east, and the temperature reached 11.9 °C at Helens Bay (County Down).

8th to 14th

The 8th started bright, with rain then spreading eastwards. The 9th was bright with showers, followed later by some longer spells of rain. It was a windy day on 10th with sunny intervals and frequent blustery showers. It was dry during the morning of 11th, before rain and sleet affected all parts during the afternoon and evening with snow on higher ground. The 12th was cloudy with outbreaks of occasionally heavy rain, sleet and snow which gradually died out later. It remained mostly cloudy on 13th with outbreaks of rain and hill snow. A brighter day followed on 14th, but with some showers which were heavy with hail giving up to one inch in places.

15th to 28th

The 15th was cloudy with rain at first, becoming drier and brighter later. Mainly dry on 16th, with fog patches slowly dispersing to allow sunny spells. After a cloudy start to 17th, rain soon cleared from the east coast, and sunny spells developed. The 18th was dry and sunny during the morning, then showers affected many places in the afternoon. It was dry and bright for much of 19th, after a cold frosty start with -5.3 °C at Katesbridge (County Down), before light rain came in during the evening. The 20th was mainly cloudy with patchy light rain at first, becoming dry, brighter and warmer; the temperature at Helens Bay reached 15.5 °C. From 21st to 25th it was mainly dry and bright with some sunshine at times, Helens Bay reaching 16.9 °C on 23rd, but cooler near the coast, with mist and fog patches on 24th and 25th. It remained fine and dry for a few more days, 26th-28th again becoming bright or sunny after the clearance of overnight mist or fog, with a touch of frost at first on the latter two days.

29th to 31st

It was cloudier on 29th with some patchy light drizzle, and became quite murky. The 30th started cloudy with patchy rain, but became mainly dry and bright. Early rain on 31st was followed by more rain later, and it became windy for a time, with a gust of 72 mph at Orlock Head (County Down).

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